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Small-Scale Agriculture Today

Office for Small-Scale Agriculture



Summer 1994

U.S. Department of Agriculture - Cooperative State Research Service - Agricultural Research For A Better Tomorrow

AT ISSUE ... LETTERS

Dear Mr. Kerr:

You and I think a lot alike. From the answers you gave to some of the questions in the article you sent, I can tell you are also of the opinion that a great many very important issues are being overlooked these days. The small people who are the heart and soul of this country very often don't get the help they deserve with the problems they have with small-scale agricultural enterprises. I was just out to see a quail grower who was able to find the answer to his problem with an internal parasite his birds had, but that help came from a fellow quail farmer who spent his time and money to travel about 70 miles to look at the birds. As an extension agent, I should be able to help this man but he has learned from past experiences that when he asks me about his birds, I have to refer the problem to someone else who may very likely not be able to give him a good answer because he/she doesn't have the time or travel funds to visit a small quail farm.

I think about this often; so many of our leaders today have no roots in the land of this country. Because of this they have a poor appreciation for the link that the land has to things like unemployment, crime, and the moral decay that is so rapidly tearing its way through the fabric of our country. People our age and older have seen agriculture become many times more "efficient" than it was 20 or 40 years ago, and we have also seen an almost perfectly inverse effect as the masses of people have left the land for the cities only to see their quality of life deteriorate.

I am anything but a doomsayer about this because I want to think I see a new movement back to the land, as people that are simply fed up with the rat race are moving out onto small acreages so their families can experience nature again. So often, however, these people are so lost with regard to even the simplest principles of agriculture that they suffer a lot of failures that could be easily prevented with just a little help. These people need the type of information you are generating.

The factory worker who still has the family farm and putters around with it on weekends needs this kind of information. There is another category that can benefit from this that is kind

of ironic to me; I work with several full-time farmers who are trying to get into sidelines like strawberries, muscadine grapes, cane syrup, green peanuts, and other things, and need information that I have trouble finding sometimes. The growing of ribbon cane and the cooking of "molasses," for example, were almost a lost art until just a few years ago. Several people are again doing this in the area.

This is too large a subject to even try to talk about in a letter, so I will just end by saying thanks for the interest you have in the lives of people we both work to serve. Thanks for the information sheets; I've already copied the one on strawberries for one grower, and I am sure they will be helpful to others as time goes by.

Keep hacking at it! If you need my help, yell.

Sincerely,

(Name withheld, April 26, 1994)

TOPICS AND TECHNOLOGY

New Ones! - Blueberries and American Ginseng are the latest free factsheets in the series "A Small-Scale Agriculture Alternative" from the USDA Office for Small-Scale Agriculture. The publications list several sources of information on cultural practices, marketing, pest control, etc. Contact: Bud Kerr, Ag Box 2244, OSSA (Factsheets), Washington, DC 20250-2244; telephone 202-401-1805, Fax 202-401-1804.

History - "Elizabeth White, a U. S. Department of Agriculture botanist, started selectively crossbreeding the largest wild blueberries in 1909, and she is responsible for today's lush, plump berries." (The Washington Times, May 11, 1994, p. E1)

Hot Topic - Fresh processing or "pre-cut" vegetables and/or fruit in a limited manner - the product is sliced, diced, peeled, or pared, or sometimes simply washed and repacked. "Redi-to-eat" is gaining in the marketplace.

PLEASE CIRCULATE

Costs \$32.95 - "Growing Roses for Small Gardens" (150 pgs.) provides ideas and information for those with restricted garden space who have to be selective to preserve a proper sense of scale. Contact: Conrad Guerrero, Timber Press, 133 S. W. Second Avenue, Suite 450, Portland, OR 97204-3527, telephone 1-800-327-5680, Fax 503-227-3070.

Wildlife Deterrent Products - For more information about non-toxic materials that discourage browsing damage caused by deer, rabbits, and raccoons, contact: Margie Peacock, Green Screen, P. O. Box 238, 2804 Benzie Hwy., Benzonia, MI 49616; telephone 1-800-968-9453.

Big Book - M. Olson in his new book "Metro Farm! The Guide to Growing for Big Profit on a Small Parcel of Land" has described many of the agronomic, economic, and managerial concepts required to generate substantial profits from agriculture locales near metro areas of the United States. More than 500 pages in paperback, the book costs \$35. Contact: TS Books, P. O. Box 1244, Santa Cruz, CA 95061-1244; telephone 1-800-624-2665.

Leisure Trends - A new Cooperative Extension publication entitled "Agritourism in New York, Opportunities and Challenges in Farm-Based Recreation and Hospitality" is available from the Farming Alternatives Program at Cornell University for \$8.50. Contact: Karene Booker, Farming Alternatives Program, 423 Warren Hall, Cornell University, Ithaca, NY 14853; telephone 607-255-9832.

Tip - Blueberry plants are generally self-fruitful, but interplanting cultivars will improve yields because some cultivars do not produce enough good pollen.

Intensive - Growing twice as many corn plants per acre -- by planting rows closer together -- stifles weeds with shade. The benefits: less chemical weed killers are used without sacrificing yield. Contact: John R. Teasdale, USDA-ARS, Weed Science Laboratory, Building 264, Room 103, Beltsville, MD 20705; telephone 301-504-5504.

Garden Pleasure - Season of Splendor is a 48-minute video directed to the "wanna know" perennial gardeners. Send a self-addressed, stamped envelope for further information. Contact: Jane H. Kuitens, 1042 State Rd., Webster, NY 14580; telephone 716-872-3720.

Tip - When leaving unsecured equipment, make it inoperable by pulling a wire or doing something else that will make it harder to be stolen or to injure curious children.

Devoted Gardeners - The 136-page book "Gardener's Latin" enables readers to find their way in the jungle of botanical Latin. To purchase a copy of the book for \$17.95, contact: Customer Service, Workman Publishing Co., 708 Broadway, New York, NY 10003; telephone 1-800-722-7202.

Gourmet - "The French are by far the world's biggest snail eaters, consuming 30,000 to 40,000 tons every year." (*The Journal of Commerce*, March 7, 1994, p. A6)

Poultry - "Good Neighbors" is a new publication. Free, the leaflet provides information on a health program for small and specialty poultry flocks. Contact: T. Milton Nelson, Cooperative Extension Service, 0126 Symons Hall, College Park, MD 20742; telephone 301-405-4596.

Did You Know? - The Herbal Gazette is a quarterly (costs \$10 annually) directed primarily to the South Central States. Introductory copies are \$2, plus enclose SASE. Contact: Betty Wold, Rt. 1, Box 80, Gore, OK 74435; telephone 918-487-5849.

Working With Stone - Here are practical and specific plans for gardeners who want to add interest and complexity to their garden settings. The 162-page paperback book "Stonescaping: A Guide to Using Stone in Your Garden" is available, postpaid, for \$19.90. Contact: Storey Communications, P. O. Box 445, Pownal, VT 05261; telephone 1-800-441-5700.

Helper - The new Calf Cradle allows one person to work calves more quickly and easily than using conventional techniques. For more information contact: Fred Wade, 198 NW 1150, Warrenburg, MO 64093; telephone 816-747-7067.

Education - Ecology Action will be holding a 3-day Sustainable Biointensive Mini-Farming Workshop in Willits, California, on November 4-6, 1994. For more information contact: Mary Compagna, 5798 Ridgewood Road, Willits, CA 95490; telephone 707-459-0150, Fax 707-459-5409.

Growing - "The emu-breeding craze is creating a small growth industry for colleges and universities with expertise in the care and feeding of the large, ostrich-like birds." (*The Chronicle of Higher Education*, February 23, 1994, p. A29)

Close to Ending - In Russia "collective farms are being dismantled acre by acre, tractor by tractor. Farmers living on the collectives are given entitlement certificates enabling them to 'buy' land and equipment at auction." (*The Wall Street Journal*, March 11, 1994, p. A9)

Update - The WIC/Farmers' Market Nutrition Program provided Federal funding in the amount of \$3.2 million to 11 States in 1993. With \$5.5 million available for 1994, 13 additional States, the District of Columbia, and one Native American tribal nation will join the original 11 States. For more information, contact: Mark Winne, The National Association of Farmers' Market Nutrition Programs, 509 Wethersfield Avenue, Hartford, CT 06114; telephone 203-296-9325.

Moo/Mood - According to the Wisconsin Dairy Council, during the first quarter of 1994, Wisconsin's 30,000 dairy farms squeezed out 42.4 billion gallons of milk. And the State's 1.5 million cows -- one for every three Wisconsinites -- each produced 100 glasses of milk every day." (*The Wall Street Journal*, May 10, 1994, p. B1)

Careful! - A strong, healthy back is vital to your job and your quality of life. **Be Careful!** Avoid injuries and make it a full-time responsibility to take care of your back.

Did You Know - Dark-colored hives help protect bees against honeybee tracheal mites. That's because the mites can't take the higher temperatures inside the dark hives, which absorb more sunlight. For more information contact: John R. Harbo, USDA-ARS, Honey Bee Breeding, Genetics and Physiology Lab, 1157 Ben Hur Rd., Baton Rouge, LA 70820; telephone 504-766-6064, Fax 504-389-0383.

Extra Weeks - By using transplants, vegetable growers—particularly those in colder regions of the country — can often get "extra weeks" to make the crop.

Book - "The Shiitake Way, Vegetarian Cookery with Shiitake Mushrooms" is a treasury of information, from preserving to basic preparation, to cooking tips. The 128-page book costs \$9.95. Contact: Anna Casini, Book Publishing Co., P.O. Box 99, Summertown, TN 38483; telephone 1-800-695-2241, Fax 615-964-3518.

Livestock Enterprise - Persons considering deer farming need information on deer feeding, breeding, health, and management. The 70-page book "A Deer Production Primer" meets this need. To order, send \$15 and contact: R.M. Jordan, 121 Peters Hall, University of Minnesota, St. Paul, MN 55108; telephone 612-624-6748.

Change - "In 1940, 23.7 million cows in the United States produced 109 billion pounds of milk. In 1993, 9.7 million cows produced 151 billion pounds." (The Sun, February 22, 1994, p. 10A)

Odds and Ends - "Bonding lambs to cows in pens and then letting them graze together on the range sharply cuts coyote raids on the sheep, U.S. Agriculture Department researchers in Las Cruces, NM, discover. . . ." (The Wall Street Journal, November 29, 1993, p. B1)

Spring Tonic - A 1-year subscription to "Hort Impact," i.e. garden tips, information, etc., is available for \$10, checks payable to University of Connecticut. Contact: Patsy W. Evans, University of Connecticut, 1376 Storrs Rd., U-67, Storrs, CT 06269-4076; telephone 203-486-1942.

Tip - Blossom-end rot in vegetables is usually associated with environmental factors such as drought or fluctuating moisture conditions.

Request - Receive the brochure "Freebies About Bees" listing 83 free plans and government publications regarding bees by contacting: Elaine C. White, Valley Hills Press, 1864 Ridgeland Drive, Starkville, MS 39759; telephone 601-323-7100.

Mid-America - Did you know there was a National Agricultural Center and Hall of Fame in the Greater Kansas City metro area? For more information contact: Melissa Ostermeyer, 630 Hall of Fame Drive (North 126th Street), Bonner Springs, KS 66012; telephone 913-721-1075, Fax 913-721-1202.

Terrific - Small-scale farmer and writer Gene Logsdon's essays and the American dream in his book, "At Nature's Pace" are just plain good reading! Published by Pantheon Books, they are available from book stores.

WHO WILL LISTEN?

It was more than a decade ago -- November 15, 1981 -- When we first met. He was the agriculture reporter for The Washington Post and had been assigned to cover the press conference for the Agricultural Research Service (ARS) Special Symposium: Research for Small Farms held at the Beltsville Agricultural Research Center, Beltsville, Maryland. I was the co-chairman of the event.

Ward Sinclair was very interested and directed extremely sharp questions to the speakers. He was also a good listener. Through the years we have tracked each other's lives, and it was a real treat for this writer to read of Ward's small-scale farming success with his partner, Cass Peterson, in the March/April 1994 issue of *The New Farm*.

Ward and Cass became small-scale farmers in 1985. By growing diverse crops and using savvy marketing practices, their gross sales in 1993 were over \$100,000. Their success story makes good reading and is a wonderful example for everyone in farming today.

In the 1981 conference, our panel discussed some of the highlights and key issues of the Special Symposium. I remember commenting that "this Symposium is perhaps one great catalytic agent providing a voice for individual small farmers to express their various needs and serves as a sounding board for the community about the transition that is occurring in our agricultural industry to all who will listen."

ARE YOU LISTENING? - (Comments of Bud Kerr, USDA-CSRS-OSSA)

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CALENDAR OF EVENTS

July 5-8, 1994 - 7th North American Blueberry Research-Extension Workers Conference, Beltsville Agricultural Research Center, USDA-ARS, Beltsville, MD. Contact: Ron Korcak, Fruit Lab, USDA-ARS, Rm. III, Bldg. 004, BARC-W, 10300 Baltimore Ave., Beltsville, MD 20705; telephone 301-504-5650, Fax 301-504-5062.

July 7-10, 1994 - Herbs '94: International Herb Growers and Marketers Association Annual Conference, Raleigh, NC. Contact: Cathy Sebastian, 1202 Allanson Road, Mundelein, IL 60060; telephone 708-949-4372, Fax 708-566-4580.

July 9, 1994 - The International Ribes Association (TIRA), Eastern Regional Meeting (Gooseberries and Currants), Susquehanna Valley Mall, Sellingsgrove, PA. Contact: Ed Mashburn, TIRA, 707 Front Street, Northumberland, PA 17857; telephone 717-988-4207, Fax 717-988-4444.

July 9-13, 1994 - International Floriculture Industry Short Course, Cincinnati Convention Center, 525 Elm St., Cincinnati, OH 45202. Contact Jane A. Lieberth, Ohio Florists' Association, 2130 Stella Court, Suite 200, Columbus, OH 43215; telephone 614-487-1117, Fax 614-487-1216.

July 17-22, 1994 - International Ginseng's Conference, The Western Bayshore, Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada. Contact: W.C. Bailey, Department of Geography, Simon

Fraser University, Burnaby, B.C., Canada V5A 1S6; telephone 604-291-3321, Fax 604-291-5841.

July 20-22, 1994 - Greenhouse Systems International Conference on Automation, Culture and the Environment. Hyatt Regency Hotel, New Brunswick, NJ. Contact: Chris Browner, Northeast Regional Agricultural Engineering Service (NRAES), Cooperative Extension, 152 Riley-Robb Hall, Ithaca, NY 14853-5701; telephone 607-255-7654.

August 5-7, 1994 - 20th Annual Summer Conference, Natural Organic Farming Association, Hampshire College, Amhurst, MA. Contact: Julie Rawson, NOFA, 411 Sheldon Road, Barre, MA 01005; telephone 508-355-2853.

August 6, 1994 - KWRE Family and Farm Expo, Lincoln County Fairgrounds, Troy, MO. Contact: Brian Richardson, P. O. Box 220, Warrenton, MO 63383; telephone 1-800-844-5328.

October 31-November 2, 1994 - The National Poultry Waste Symposium, Holiday Inn, Athens, GA 30603. Contact: Richard Reynnells, USDA-ES, Ag Box 0911, Washington DC 20250-0911; telephone 202-720-4087; Fax 202-720-7714.

November 1, 1994 - The Tennessee Alternative Growers Association (TAGA) Fall Conference, Standing Stone State Park, Livingston, TN. Contact: Paul D. Roe, 164 Roe Lane, Livingston, TN 38570; telephone 615-823-7844.

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